

VII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The original vision of most of the One-Stop Career Centers in our sample was to develop a strong self-service infrastructure that would minimally involve staff. This vision has changed somewhat in light of implementation experiences that have demonstrated that many Center customers need at least initial staff assistance to help them use self-service resources effectively. Ideally, as these customers acquire greater familiarity with self-service options, they will need progressively less staff assistance to move toward a self-directed job search. But, even then, many can benefit greatly from periodic guidance from Center staff. For this reason, it may be less appropriate to view self-services at One-Stop Centers as a separate "tier" of services, but rather as comprising one end of a continuum of One-Stop services of varying staff intensity.

In terms of actions that Centers can take to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of self-services, the design of physical facilities constitutes an important initial step to be considered. As we described in Chapter II, the general design guidelines prepared by states and adopted by localities emphasize the ease of access to the facilities and resources for all One-Stop customers, including those with unique needs. At many of the One-Stop Centers in our sample, we also found that the layout and design of the physical space reflect the ideal of a more accessible, user-friendly, and less bureaucratic workforce development system. Centers strive to design common areas in the Resource Rooms to be aesthetically pleasing, incorporating creative physical designs including the use of large windows, ample lighting, and attractive furnishings. Envisioning the Resource Room as "like a library" is a metaphor that was commonly expressed. The design of many Centers strikes a balance between providing openness while at the same time allowing opportunities for the privacy that customers will sometimes need.

Many design elements also support the goal of providing a range of services to diverse customers as efficiently as possible. As an example of this, some Centers have experimented with layouts that allow staff to serve multiple functions. Thus, for example, the Help

Desk is often placed near the entrance to the facility, but with a clear view of the computer banks and telephones and copiers. In this way, Center staff can greet customers as they walk in, monitor the use of the array of Resource Room resources, and also see when computer users need assistance. Those study sites that have expanded in recent years have also taken the opportunity to provide more space for a broader range of partners and to enhance their resource area offerings.

With respect to facilitating customer access to self-services, as was discussed in Chapter III, one of the common themes among One-Stop Center practitioners is "helping people help themselves" by encouraging self-directed activities. Thus, many Centers emphasize the importance of providing customers with an initial orientation to the resources available and organizing materials as clearly as possible, while providing staff assistance on an as-needed basis.

Centers have adopted a variety of approaches toward achieving this goal of enhancing customers' understanding of self-services. Many sites have greeters that provide an introduction to Center resources, and one-on-one tours and general orientation workshops for new customers are quite common. Similarly, clear signage can be critically important, as are concise and clear user guides for software packages and "bookmarks" for Internet web sites of potential interest to the job seeker. Moreover, all Centers provide at least some workshops that are designed to help customers to gain a better understanding of specific self-service tools.

Centers varied considerably in the level of effort they devote to orienting customers to using self-services. For example, although some Centers provide printed guides for using self-service technologies—such as the Internet job listing resources, career planning software, or resume software, other Centers provide customers with little, if any, relevant documentation. In general, the latter find that providing staff assistance thus becomes even more necessary.

In Chapter III, we also described the ways in which Centers attempt to market their services and attract diverse customers. Examples of general marketing include television and newspaper advertisements, posting information on web sites, and sponsoring Job Fairs. Outreach efforts to special populations include conducting targeted mailings, establishing referral linkages with One-Stop partners or community-based organizations, providing Center tours for groups

with special needs, and using Center space for community meetings.

Centers also adopt strategies to make self-services more accessible to groups with unique needs including individuals with disabilities, persons with limited computer skills, public assistance recipients, youth customers, and non-native English speakers. For example, young people sometimes receive customized orientations to resource areas and, in some case, have a room in the Center devoted exclusively to their needs, with computer software and other materials geared towards career planning for new job entrants. Similarly, although all Centers are ADA compliant, many have purchased an array of assistive equipment to help those with mobility, visual, or hearing impairments access self-services. In a few instances, staff members have received sensitivity training to improve their ability to provide appropriate and effective assistance to individuals with disabilities. Some Centers also seek to facilitate access to persons that are currently employed or those with young children, by offering extended hours of service or on-site childcare. Providing access to self-services through mini satellite Centers is another means to reach a broad customer base or a targeted population.

Another important issue for One-Stop Career Centers is to find ways to track Center use and to document the outcomes of self-services. As we discussed in Chapter III, there are currently a variety of mechanisms in place for tracking center use, ranging from sign-up sheets to more sophisticated electronic tracking systems, such as swipe cards. However, capturing the benefits of the self-service system in terms of employment outcomes or participation in training or education programs may prove to be much more difficult and expensive. Given the challenges associated with tracking outcomes in a self-service context, many Centers have devoted more resources toward measuring customer satisfaction with self-service tools and resources.

In Chapter IV, we described the variety of staffing arrangements across One-Stop Centers. Because staff assistance to some degree appears to be critical to the effective use of Resource Rooms, staffing arrangements are of considerable importance. We detail several approaches to staffing resource areas that were used in the last years of JTPA, including providing full-time staff for these areas, having members from different programs or agencies serve resource area customers on a rotating or “on-call” basis, or adopting a blend of these

approaches. Regardless of which approach Centers adopt, the roles and responsibilities of resource area staff members are often extremely varied. Responsibilities can range from greeting customers and orientating them to Center resources, providing customers with individualized assistance, developing curricula and facilitating workshops on self-services, and organizing and updating resource area materials.

Because the demands on staff are so varied, building staff capacity for resource area staff is a major concern for One-Stop Career Centers. Within the multidisciplinary team framework promoted at many One-Stop Career Centers, staff need to develop the skills required of the emerging culture of customer service. Also, because technologies are constantly changing, it is crucial that staff possess both the necessary computer skills and broad knowledge of the variety of electronic and other self-service resources. Furthermore, staff must be acquainted with the needs of an extremely diverse customer base. In many cases, however, opportunities and resources for capacity building are quite limited. Further exacerbating challenges to capacity-building efforts are the high levels of staff turnover encountered at some Centers.

Chapter V details the types of self-service information and resources typically available at One-Stop Centers. The topic-specific areas that we covered include assessment and career planning, education and training opportunities, labor market information, job search listings and resources, and resume preparation software.

We found that job seekers at One-Stop Centers are primarily interested in finding immediate employment, and as a result they often prefer those services that they view as most directly related to their job search. For this reason, job listings and resume-writing packages are very popular at most Centers. Some Centers, however, have also achieved relative success in promoting the use of career assessment and exploration tools, materials on education and training providers, and information pertaining to local labor markets.

For each of these topic areas, we discussed the relative strengths and weaknesses of the available resources. A few of these comments are detailed below:

- *Career planning and assessment tools* are becoming

increasingly sophisticated, often allowing customers to link their assessment results to information on jobs and providers of education and training. These tools, however, have some drawbacks. For example, tools that are simple and quick to use are more appealing to customers in a self-services context, but may not yield very detailed assessment results; tools yielding more reliable and detailed results, by contrast, are often intimidating and complex. Additionally, customers may not understand the differing assessment results that can occur depending on the assessment tools' emphasis on interests, abilities, or aptitudes, or the relative importance of these various factors to career planning. Thus, some level of professional assistance may continue to be necessary to assist customers with the career planning and exploration process.

- *Information on education and training providers.* Several career planning and assessment software programs link to databases containing comprehensive information on post-secondary and training institutions, and some programs also allow users to sort by region, area of study, tuition rates, or other relevant factors. However, only two sites provide access to state consumer report systems on vocational-technical and college programs. Moreover, in several sites, printed materials concerning education and training opportunities were either out-of-date, poorly organized, or both. Thus, these are areas for further improvement.
- Providing up-to-date and locally relevant *labor market information* continues to be a major challenge for many Centers. Moreover, customers are often overwhelmed by vast amounts of LMI that they do not know how to apply in making career decisions. Among the effective strategies that increased the usefulness of LMI include the integration of LMI into workshops for customers and the systematic development of staff competence in using and interpreting LMI.
- Customer access to *job listings* remains an extremely popular feature of One-Stop Career Centers. Several Centers further facilitate the job search process by providing Internet bookmarks or links to relevant job-listing sources or by providing customers with printed guides to popular job search sites. The rapid development of electronic media for matching applicants with jobs through America's Job Bank and searching through the hundreds of other electronic sites providing job listings have profoundly altered the job search process for many Americans. However, often because of employer preferences, job matching continues to remain a major function for Employment Service and other staff at One-Stop Career Centers.
- *Resume writing programs* are another very popular offering

at One-Stop Career Centers and are particularly useful for customers with computer skills and recent job-search experience. Yet because these programs assume at least a modicum of computer competence, staff at many Centers continue to help less experienced customers create resumes.

In Chapter VI, we discussed services for employer customers and found reluctance on the part of many employers to embrace the range of new self-service options available to them. Many employers we interviewed expressed a preference for maintaining a personal contact with a job developer or employer services staff member of the Center, even if they also utilize self-services. Several One-Stop Career Centers have developed strategies designed to promote more active employer use of One-Stop resources. These strategies include providing specifically designated resource areas for employers, allowing on-site recruitment, and sponsoring employer workshops, panels, and “meet the employer” sessions. Another promising practice is to have staff visit employers, taking a laptop computer along with them, so that they can demonstrate how to post job listings and access the Center’s on-line services.

Overall, it is clear that the Centers in our study have made great strides in expanding access and customer choice for self-services within the One-Stop Career Center system. They are thus well along toward the goal of providing universal access to a wide range of tools and resources for a diverse range of customers. Based on their experiences, important lessons were learned and challenges were identified. Beyond the issues that arose with respect to the effective use of specific resources and tools, which we summarized earlier in this chapter, the most significant challenges that emerged from this study are discussed below.

- *Resource Rooms can and should be designed deliberately, to facilitate access to self-services.* Centers in this study were often extremely thoughtful and deliberate in designing the Resource Room and other self-service areas to foster an inviting atmosphere and promote a smooth and efficient customer flow. Similarly, Centers discovered that quiet areas are required for certain functions, such as making telephone calls, and that the design should promote a feeling of “openness,” while balancing the customers’ need for some privacy.
- *Centers must develop marketing and outreach mechanisms to attract a diverse range of customers.* While most One-Stop

Career Centers have a vision of the Center as an important “community resource,” many Centers serve a predominantly ES/JTPA customer base. In order to attract a more diverse range of customers into the Resource Room, Centers must develop more aggressive marketing and outreach mechanisms as well as linkages with a broad range of employers.

- *State and local One-Stop systems need to accommodate potential Center users with limited computer skills*, who are often intimidated and unable to use many Resource Room tools and services on their own. Promising strategies to promote access among individuals with limited computer skills include offering computer tutorials or workshops on basic computer skills on site.
- *New customers will need an orientation to Center services*. The orientation should take the form of a combination of brochures, kiosks or videos (e.g., available in waiting areas), web sites offering an introduction to Center services or virtual tours, and orientation workshops and walk-throughs.
- *Clear signage and easy-to-understand written instructions are imperative in helping customers to get oriented to Resource Room materials and resources and facilitating their use*. Thus, signage should clearly identify which computers are loaded with what software. Clear guidance also needs to be provided about what software should be used for what purposes and how they each should be used (e.g., how to access the software, how to navigate, etc.). Several of the Centers we studied provided excellent examples of how this could be done effectively.
- *Staff play a critical set of roles in a self-service context*, including designing and facilitating workshops, organizing the various tools and resources, and providing individualized assistance. Even with clear signage and written instructions, many users will need assistance from staff, at least periodically, and they greatly value the face-to-face interaction. For those persons with little work or job-search experience or for those lacking technical skills, staff assistance is especially critical. Moreover, because the job search or career change process can be stressful even for persons with advanced skills, the “human touch” is often appreciated.
- *One-Stop systems must continually promote staff capacity building*. Having an experienced and well-trained cadre of staff is extremely important to the development of self-services in One-Stop Career Centers, particularly given that the number and diversity of universal customers accessing

resources in many of the study sites continue to increase. Investment in capacity building, however, in terms of developing both the technical and interpersonal skills required of resource staff, is often difficult because of financial or time constraints. Similarly, staff turnover is often high at some Centers, making it difficult to build a sustainable and continuous program of capacity development.

- *One-Stop systems have encountered challenges in designing effective strategies to promote remote access to self-services.* Several One-Stop systems have sought to improve access to self-services by establishing remote access points. Although kiosks represent one strategy to provide remote access, they are typically limited in functionality and often viewed as more of a marketing tool. Centers in this study achieved greater success in encouraging remote access to services by creating satellite Centers accessible to target populations (e.g., at locations such as secondary schools or public housing developments).
- *Documenting the performance of the self-service system poses numerous challenges for One-Stop systems.* In an era in which every area of public service is under legislative mandate to demonstrate results, documenting the performance of a self-service system will continue to represent one of the greatest challenges facing the emerging One-Stop Career Center system. Although all of the Centers examined in this study have at least some system in place to track customer usage (e.g., numbers of persons using the Center on a daily basis), and a few have methods for tracking more detailed information (e.g., the types of services accessed), it will be extremely difficult for One-Stop Career Centers to establish mechanisms that capture the outcomes that result from using self-services, such as obtaining employment or enrolling in a training program. Therefore, efforts to measure customer satisfaction with services and resources may provide the most helpful information to improve the quality and effectiveness of the self-service system.
- *Increasing employer awareness and use of self-services presents another challenge for One-Stop systems.* Although many large employers have developed Internet web-sites and have relatively sophisticated recruitment strategies, many of the employers currently served by the One-Stop Centers in our sample remain relatively dependent on staff assistance for many phases of the job-matching process. Therefore, One-Stop Career Centers should continue developing strategies and implementing practices designed to acquaint the small- and medium-sized employers they serve with the

variety of emerging self-service technologies. Moreover, efforts to attract employer customers to the Center, such as “meet the employer” sessions, can play an important role in facilitating the labor exchange process.